



U.S. Agency for
International
Development

Bureau for
Global Health

COUNTRY PROFILE

HIV/AIDS

EGYPT

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Egypt appears to be at an early stage and Egypt is classified as a low prevalence country. Although the HIV/AIDS Hotline, operated by the Ministry of Health and Population, is considered an innovative intervention, Egypt will continue to face serious challenges in maintaining a low prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2001)	8,000
Total Population (2001)	69.08 million
Adult HIV Prevalence (end 2001)	<0.1%
HIV-1 Seroprevalence in Urban Areas	
Population most at risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, patients with a sexually transmitted infection, or others with known risk factors)	0%
Population not at risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	0%

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau

At the end of 2001, according to UNAIDS/WHO, an estimated 8,000 adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS. The adult prevalence rate is less than 1 percent. Near the end of 2002, 339 cases of AIDS had been reported in Egypt. Nearly 81 percent of these cases occurred among individuals aged 25 to 49 years. Sexual contact is the primary mode of HIV transmission. Reported AIDS cases (89.5 percent) are predominantly men. Among all reported infections, 44 percent occurred through heterosexual contact, and 23 percent occurred among men who have sex with men. Other modes of transmission include unsafe injections and blood transfusions (18 percent) and injecting drug use (4 percent). Eleven percent of cases are attributed to unknown or untraceable modes of transmission, according to National AIDS Program surveillance data as of October 2002.

Discussion of sexual practices is culturally difficult throughout most of Egypt and presents a major challenge to keeping the public informed. Barrier methods of contraception, which offer some protection against sexually transmitted infections, receive little promotion and use. The government is acutely aware that discussion of sexual matters concerning youth, persons outside of marriage, or homosexuality are highly controversial. Therefore, scientific assessment of the risk of transmission, based on these behavioral factors and public discussion concerning estimates of risk, rarely occurs.

Egypt faces several challenges in maintaining low prevalence of HIV/AIDS:



Map of Egypt: PCL Map Collection, University of Texas

- Despite an extensive primary health care system and health infrastructure, the system is weak in preventive measures and surveillance of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV;
- Poor access to reproductive health information and health care, particularly by young people and the illiterate (largely women);
- Abundance of economically and socially marginalized refugees from Sudan and the Horn of Africa countries;
- Low status of women (low rate of employment, low secondary school completion);
- Migration of large numbers of Egyptian men, who work abroad and may return home carrying HIV;
- Millions of tourists entering Egypt from countries with high HIV prevalence and/or illicit drug use rates;

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- Pervasive fear and stigmatization;
- Lack of effective STI/HIV/AIDS education programs and other prevention measures, such as the diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections;
- Low apparent condom demand and use, despite significant commercial sex activity;
- High incidence of sexually transmitted infections in specific populations also at risk for HIV infection;
- Population shift to urban areas due to scarce employment and other economic opportunities in rural regions;
- Growing and unclear patterns of injecting drug use, and
- Inadequate universal precautions applied in blood banks, as well as unsafe injection practices.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Ministry of Health and Population has established an HIV/AIDS control program. Its HIV/AIDS Hotline, developed with a grant from the Ford Foundation, is considered to be one of the most innovative HIV/AIDS prevention activities in the region. The hotline receives, on average, more than 1,000 calls per month, some of which are made from other Arab countries and by Egyptians living abroad. Most of the callers are unmarried young men seeking anonymous access to information about AIDS and basic sex education. Discussions with several donors are underway to increase the number of voluntary counseling and testing centers and institute antiretroviral therapy at one or two health centers.

USAID SUPPORT

The relatively low level of reported HIV infections and active AIDS cases has not ignited widespread donor action. In general, the donor community is not directly addressing at-risk populations, and HIV/AIDS prevention and care are not the primary focus of most projects.

Egypt is one of 31 countries receiving limited resources from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to monitor and track HIV prevalence; provide technical assistance, training, and commodity support; and leverage additional sources of funding and support. In these low prevalence countries, USAID recommends that missions support surveillance systems and targeted interventions toward the most vulnerable populations.

USAID funding for HIV/AIDS activities in Egypt totaled \$1.19 million in 2001, and \$1.2 million in 2002.

USAID launched a \$6.3 million Asia/Near East Regional HIV/AIDS project in fiscal 2000. Egypt is included in the project, which establishes and promotes best practices to prevent HIV transmission and provide care to persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families. USAID has also begun joint programming to coordinate efforts among the HIV/AIDS and infectious diseases programs in the region, which will include tuberculosis and malaria programs in nearby countries.

Behavior Change Communication

USAID assistance is working to break the silence on HIV/AIDS. Efforts to thwart a widespread epidemic focus on those who are at risk for HIV infection, starting with injecting drug users, and including those living away from their families. With funding from USAID, Family Health International/IMPACT is implementing a pilot project with a local nongovernmental organization to target illicit drug users.

Involving People Living with HIV/AIDS

Most people living with AIDS in Egypt are still invisible. It will not be possible to make progress in combating the epidemic unless AIDS becomes visible, stigmatization is challenged, and people living with HIV are encouraged to play their part in a community-wide AIDS response. This requires resolve and courageous leadership at various levels, particularly by government and religious leaders. Furthermore, USAID is carrying out strong advocacy to make the Government of Egypt aware of the need to improve HIV/AIDS case management and to begin implementation of antiretroviral therapy in selected hospitals in FY 2003.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In 2000, a situational analysis of the National Blood Transfusion Service Donor Recruitment Program was completed, which provided the basis for an \$850,000 Blood Donor Recruitment Project to complement a blood bank project being sponsored by Switzerland. In 2001, USAID added \$1 million to cover the blood bank and HIV/AIDS prevention activities in Egypt. This project has yielded a framework to increase voluntary blood donations, including record-keeping and data management systems to enable retention of safe donors; a course in basic principles of safe blood collection; and universal precaution guidelines, policies, and procedures.

Through the IMPACT project, USAID also conducted a prevalence study of sexually transmitted infections with the Ministry of Public Health and USAID/Cairo. Results of this study are being used to design culturally appropriate interventions.

USAID, through a service agreement with the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No.3, is providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Health and Population in Egypt to establish an Epidemiology and Surveillance System that will track the prevalence of the 27 priority infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Prevention

Appropriate information is being provided to young Egyptians on prevention and healthy lifestyles. The information must be in a language they understand and to which they can relate, an essential for success in any AIDS response. Research has shown that regardless of the stage of the epidemic, investing in young people is a high-return strategy. In every country where HIV transmission has been reduced, it has been among young people that the most spectacular reductions have occurred. USAID is working with Family Health International and the National AIDS Program to establish the first voluntary counseling and testing centers. USAID is also supporting U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No.3 to set up the National Infection Control Guidelines in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Population.

Youth and HIV/AIDS

With funding from USAID, the Centre for Development and Population Activities is implementing a \$6 million program called New Horizons for Girls. The project is designed to improve health and educational opportunities for girls and young women living in Upper Egypt, and specifically addresses sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. A similar project focusing on the needs of boys and young men is in development.

Other support includes UNICEF, the Ford Foundation, UNAIDS, WHO, ILO, and the Swiss Red Cross.

Important Links and Contacts

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USAID/Egypt Web site: <http://www.usaid-eg.org>

USAID HIV/AIDS Web site for Egypt: http://www.usaid.gov/pop_health/aids/Countries/ane/egypt.html

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For more information, see www.usaid.gov/pop/aids or www.synergyaids.com.

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